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LOWELL, INDIANA

Rosemary Anderson
Indiana Folklore
Dr. Roberts
July 28, 1977

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LOWELL, INDIANA

INTRODUCTION

Lowell, Indiana, is situated in southern Lake County, the northwesternmost county in the state. It is 140 miles northwest of Indianapolis; 30 miles south of Gary; and 45 miles southeast of Chicago. Interstate highway 65 is located 3 miles to the east, and U. S. Route 41, 2 miles to the west. In 1975, the population was 5,305. It can be thought of as a "typical small town;" typical in the presence of both common and unusual features.

There is a definite pattern of life common to all small rural communities. This pattern is readily identifiable; the words "small town" are enough to evoke a mental image composed of certain physical characteristics, a particular life style, and a (usually limited) range of attitudes and beliefs. This concept could be viewed as the folklore of small towns in general.

Obviously, however, each particular small town has an unique blend of characteristics which distinguish it from every other similar town. Climate, geography, history, ethnic composition, transportation, location with regard to other towns and cities, institutions; all of these common features are combined in uncommon ways. This unique blend constitutes the folklore of any given town.

For example, towns may be founded for a variety of reasons. In Lake County, most towns fall into one of three categories. They were

either (1) founded by an individual; (2) founded by a railroad or corporation; or (3) the result of general settlement at a particular site. Crown Point, the county seat, is an example of the last. It was the place where the first settlers in the county decided to stop when they arrived. Griffith and Whiting are railroad and "company" towns (cities now, of course). Lowell was founded in 1852 by Melvin A. Halsted. He built a saw mill, a flour mill, a school, the first brick house in the county, and laid out lots.

So, although Lowell can be categorized in this manner, and shares this basic characteristic with other towns in the county, the moment one begins to describe this characteristic, one enters the realm of folklore. Halsted's activities were part of the traditional way of life, and became in themselves a tradition in Lowell. An awareness of this tradition, if nothing else, has persisted to the present and influences the attitudes of many residents toward the present and future development of the town.

SOURCES

There are a number of books available which deal with the early history of Lake County. Of these, three were of primary importance for this paper, and deserve some brief description.

LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA, FROM 1834 TO 1872, and NORTHWESTERN INDIANA FROM 1800 TO 1900 are two of the many books written by Rev. Timothy H. Ball. Ball came into Lake County in 1837, at the age of 11, his family being among the earliest to settle in the area. Ball was, among other things, a minister, an educator, an historian, and a prolific writer. He was very much interested in the history and development of the region, and his works are accepted standard references.

THE COUNTIES OF PORTER AND LAKE, INDIANA, by Weston Goodspeed and Charles Blanchard, was one of the flood of county histories published in the Midwest in the 1870's and 1880's. Like all of these histories, it was a money-making project, and while the authors strove to be as accurate as possible, they lacked the in-depth knowledge of the area which "native" authors such as Ball possessed.

Among these three sources, there are many contradictions and inconsistencies, as will become apparent. It would require much more extensive research than I was able to conduct to fully resolve these differences. However, a judicious weighing of the information in these books, together with material from other written and oral sources, can enable one to arrive, in most cases, at a consensus.

In researching the history of Lowell itself, besides the books mentioned above, several other sources have proved valuable. The HISTORY OF LAKE COUNTY, VOL. XI, a collection of papers published by the Lake County Historical Society in 1934, the LOWELL CENTENNIAL BOOK (1952) and the THREE-CREEK BICENTENNIAL BOOK (1976) have been most useful. (As the latter two are unpaged, they will be cited in the body of the text and in the bibliography only.)

Interviews with Mrs. Marian Hayden, Mrs. Ed Brownell, and Mr. and Mrs. Ray McIntire were not only profitable, but fun. Mrs. Janet Granger of the Lowell Public Library provided both information and direction.

LAKE COUNTY

Some background information on Lake County will be valuable at this point.

Bounded on the north by Lake Michigan and the south by the Kankakee River, Lake County straddles the Mississippi - St. Lawrence watershed. The northern portion of the county is (or was) a series of sand ridges running east and west, indicating that Lake Michigan once extended several miles south of its present shoreline. The central section of the county is level or rolling prairie and woodland, while the extreme southern portion was, until the early 1900's, an extensive marshland surrounding the Kankakee River.

The area was originally inhabited by the Pottawatomies. In 1832, the Indians relinquished all claims to the area, although there were scattered groups who continued to live in the region into the 1840's.

In 1833, a stage line between Detroit and Ft. Dearborn (Chicago) was opened, and the first settlers began to appear. In that same year, a man named Bennett opened a tavern near the mouth of the Calumet River, in the northern part of the county.

In the summer of 1834, government surveyors laid out the county in sections, and that fall, the first permanent settlers in the central and southern portions of the county arrived. Thomas Childers, Solon Robinson, Robert Wilkinson and their families settled in October and November.

Settlement of the county from 1835 on was relatively rapid. Solon

Robinson wrote: "In the fall of 1835 we had grown into so much importance that the tax collector from La Porte came up to pay us a visit, which was about as welcome as such visits generally are."[1]

In 1836 Porter County was organized and Lake Territory attached to it. The Territory was divided into three townships and elections held in each for justice of the peace.

In July, 1836, the Squatters' Union of Lake County was organized, and its Constitution signed by 476 men. Speculators had been active in public land sales in northwest Indiana, a fact which was responsible for the formation of the Union, as the Preamble and first three Articles of the Constitution attest.

> "PREAMBLE. Whereas, The settlers upon the public lands in this county, not having any certain prospect of having their rights and claims secured to them by a preëmption law of Congress, and feeling the strong present necessity of their becoming united in such a manner as to guard against speculation upon our rights, have met and united together to maintain and support each other, on the 4th of July, 1836; and now firmly convinced of the justness of our cause, do most solemnly pledge ourselves to each other, by the strong ties of interest and brotherly feeling, that we will abide by the several resolutions hereto attached (and to which we will sign our names), in the most faithful manner.
>
> "ARTICLE 1st. Resolved, That every person who bears all the dangers and difficulties of settling a new and unimproved country is justly entitled to the privilege heretofore extended to settlers by Congress, to purchase their lands at a dollar and a quarter an acre.
>
> "ARTICLE 2nd. Resolved, That if Congress should neglect or refuse to pass a law before the land on which we live is offered for sale, which shall secure to us our rights, we will hereafter adopt such measures as may be necessary effectually to secure each other in our just claims.

---

[1] Solon Robinson, quoted in Timothy H. Ball, LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA, FROM 1834 TO 1872 (Chicago: J. W. Goodspeed, 1873), p. 34.

"ARTICLE 3d. Resolved, That we will not aid any person to purchase his claim at the land sale, according to this constitution unless he is at the time an actual settler upon government lands, and has complied with all of the requisitions of this Constitution."[2]

Lake County was organized in 1837, and land sales were held two years later. In his NORTHWESTERN INDIANA, Ball notes succinctly: "Speculators did not bid against five hundred united, determined, and probably armed men."[3]

From this point on, the growth of the county was along fairly typical lines. One factor which stimulated settlement and industrial development was the proximity to Chicago, and the fact that all land traffic to the city from the east had to pass through Lake County. Industrial development was of major importance in the northern part of the county from 1880 on.

Ball quotes Solon Robinson to the effect that in 1847, most of the residents of the county were "Yorkers" and "Yankees." Besides these New York and New England natives, there were also quite a number of German families, as well as some Irish and English.[4] This ethnic make-up remained basically unchanged until the influx of Middle and Eastern Europeans in the northern portions of the county around the turn of the century.

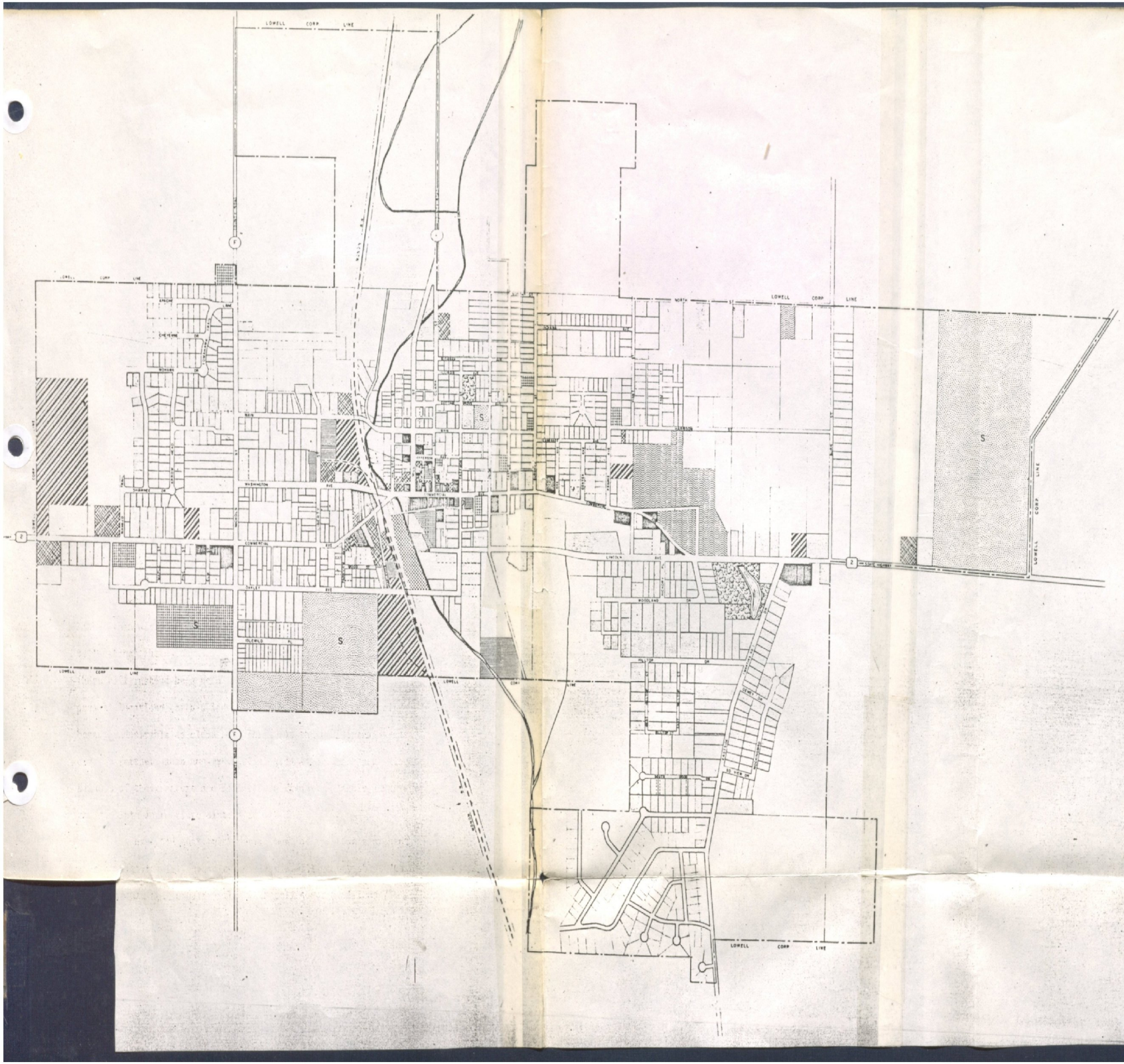
---

[2]"Constitution of the Squatters' Union, in Lake County, Indiana," quoted in Ball, LAKE COUNTY, pp. 40-41.

[3]Timothy H. Ball, NORTHWESTERN INDIANA FROM 1800 TO 1900 (Chicago: J. W. Goodspeed, 1900), p. 60.

[4]Ibid., pp. 493-494.

An interesting sidelight to the development of the county, as well as to the effects of inflation over 140 years, can be seen in changing land values. According to the THREE-CREEK BICENTENNIAL BOOK, when the government bought one million acres from Chief Pokagon in 1833, the price was 3¢ per acre. In 1837, when land sales began, the government sold the same land at $1.25 an acre. By 1891, market value was $4.50 per acre. In 1950, the price had risen - slightly - to $125 an acre. If Chief Pokagon had been around in 1976, and wanted to buy back one acre of his land, it would have cost him $1500 - the amount he received for 50,000 acres in 1833.



MAP No. V

EXISTING LAND USE

- RESIDENTIAL
- BUSINESS
- COMMERCIAL SERVICE
- INDUSTRY
- CHURCH
- CHURCH AND SCHOOL
- PUBLIC SCHOOL
- PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS
- PUBLIC FACILITIES
- QUASI PUBLIC
- PARKING
- CEMETERY

- STATE HIGHWAY
- COUNTY ROAD
- STREETS AND ALLEYS
- RAILROAD R.O.W.
- TOWN BOUNDARY

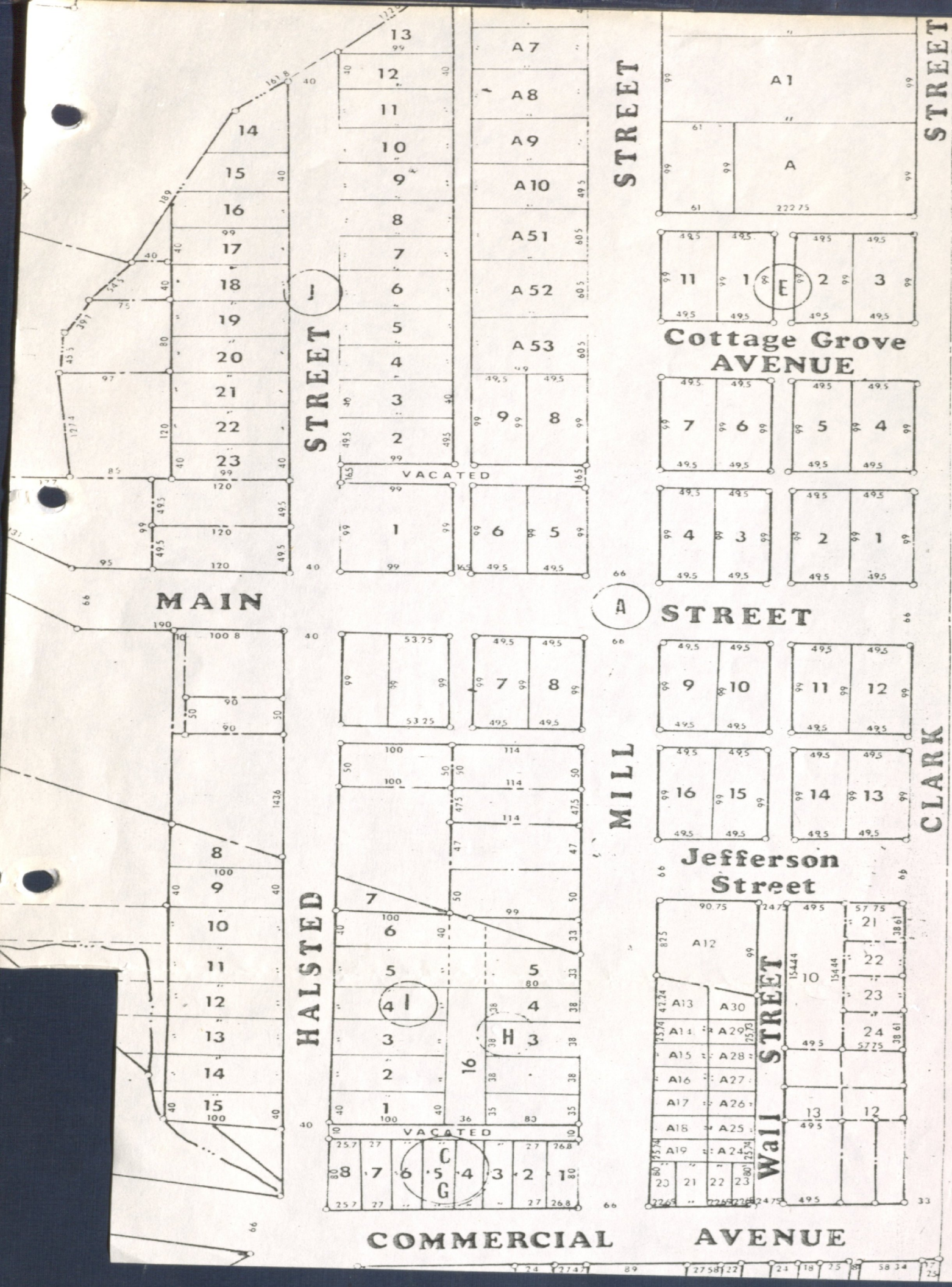
ONE ACRE

0 200 400 600 800
SCALE

N

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
LOWELL, INDIANA
1967

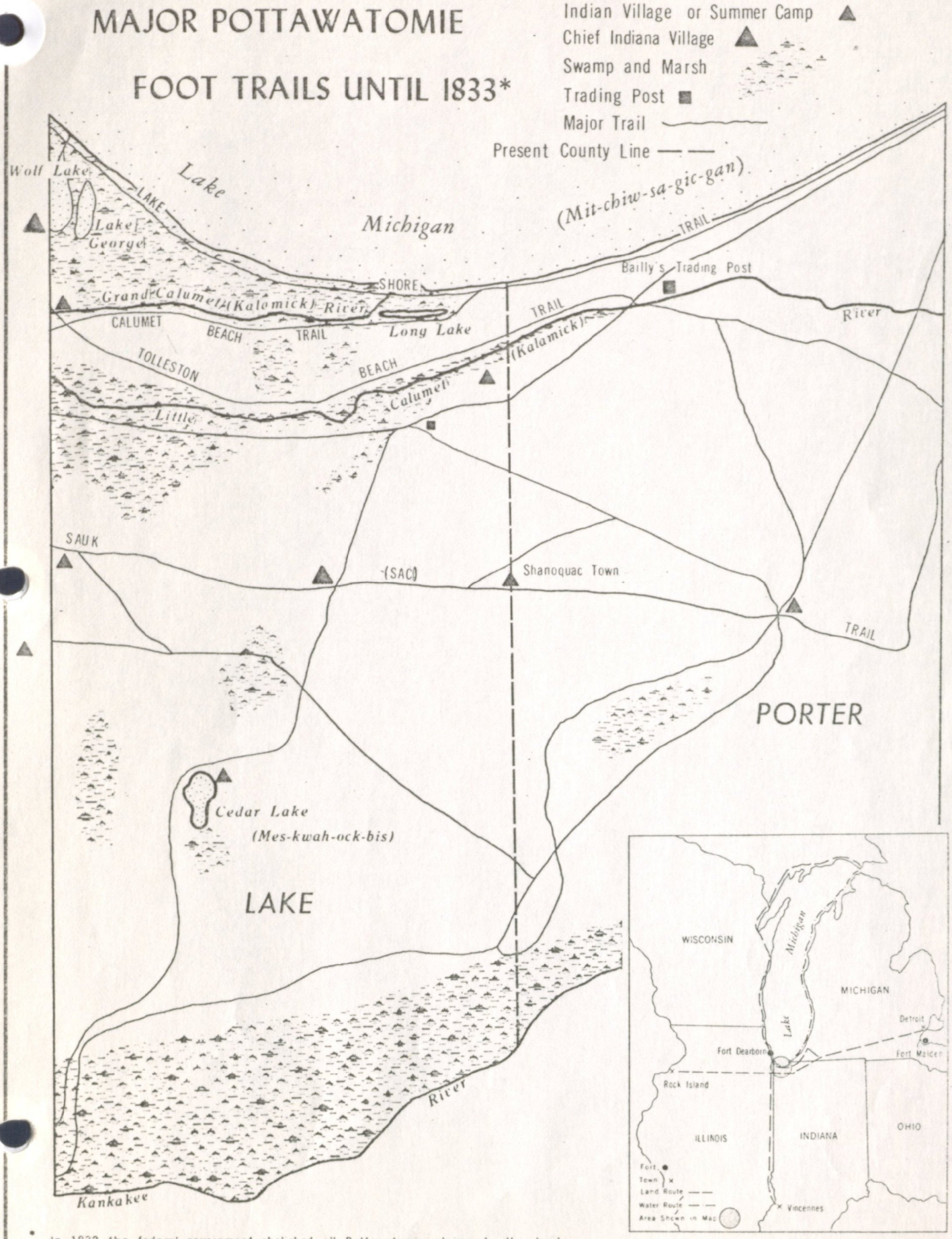
Prepared by
PURDUE-CALUMET DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION


MAIN
STREET
STREET
STREET
Cottage Grove
AVENUE
VACATED
A
STREET
MILL
CLARK
Jefferson
Street
HALSTED
Wall
STREET
VACATED
COMMERCIAL
AVENUE

The following is a plat of the oldest sections of Lowell as laid out by Melvin Halsted. It will be noted that his home (sect. J, lot 1) was not part of the original town, but only included in his last addition.

Sect. A	-	Lots 1-16	Original town
E	-	Lots 1-11	Addition 1
(F	-		Addition 2)
		not shown	
G	-	Lots 1- 8	Addition 3
H	-	Lots 3- 5	Addition 4
I	-	Lots 1-16	Addition 5
J	-	Lots 1-23	Addition 6

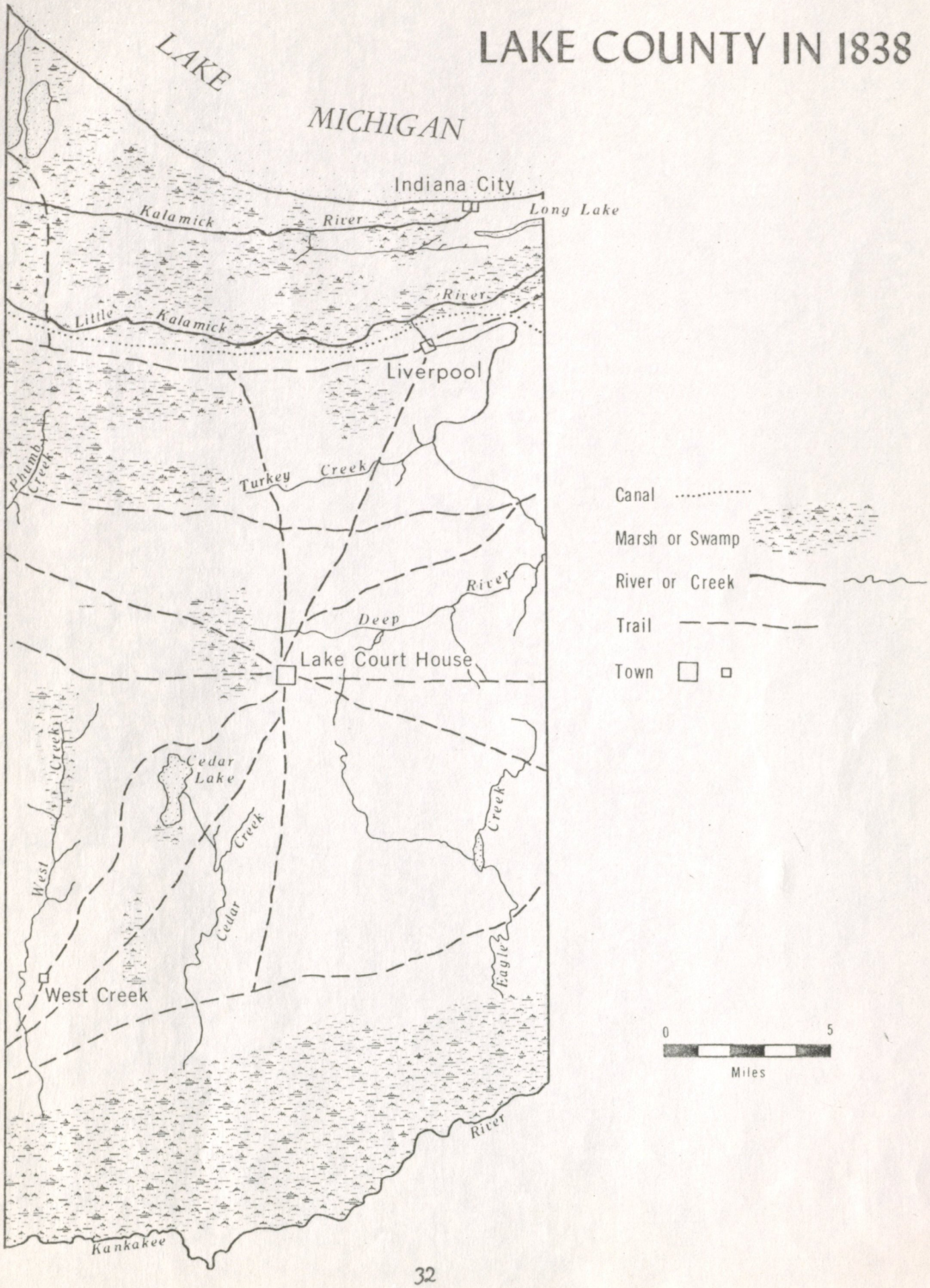
MAJOR POTTAWATOMIE FOOT TRAILS UNTIL 1833*



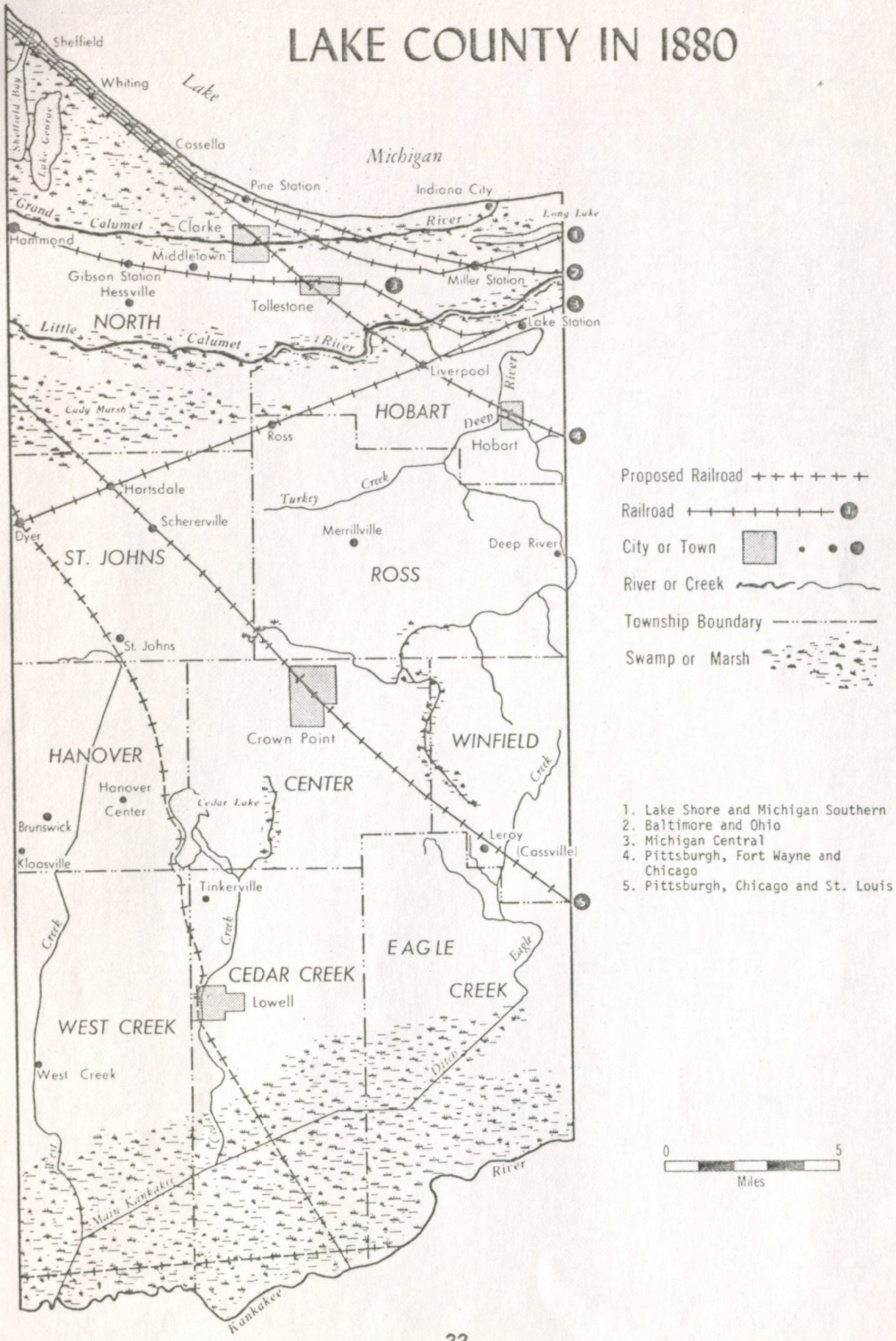
* In 1832 the federal government abolished all Pottawatomie claims to the land

MAP 5

LAKE COUNTY IN 1838

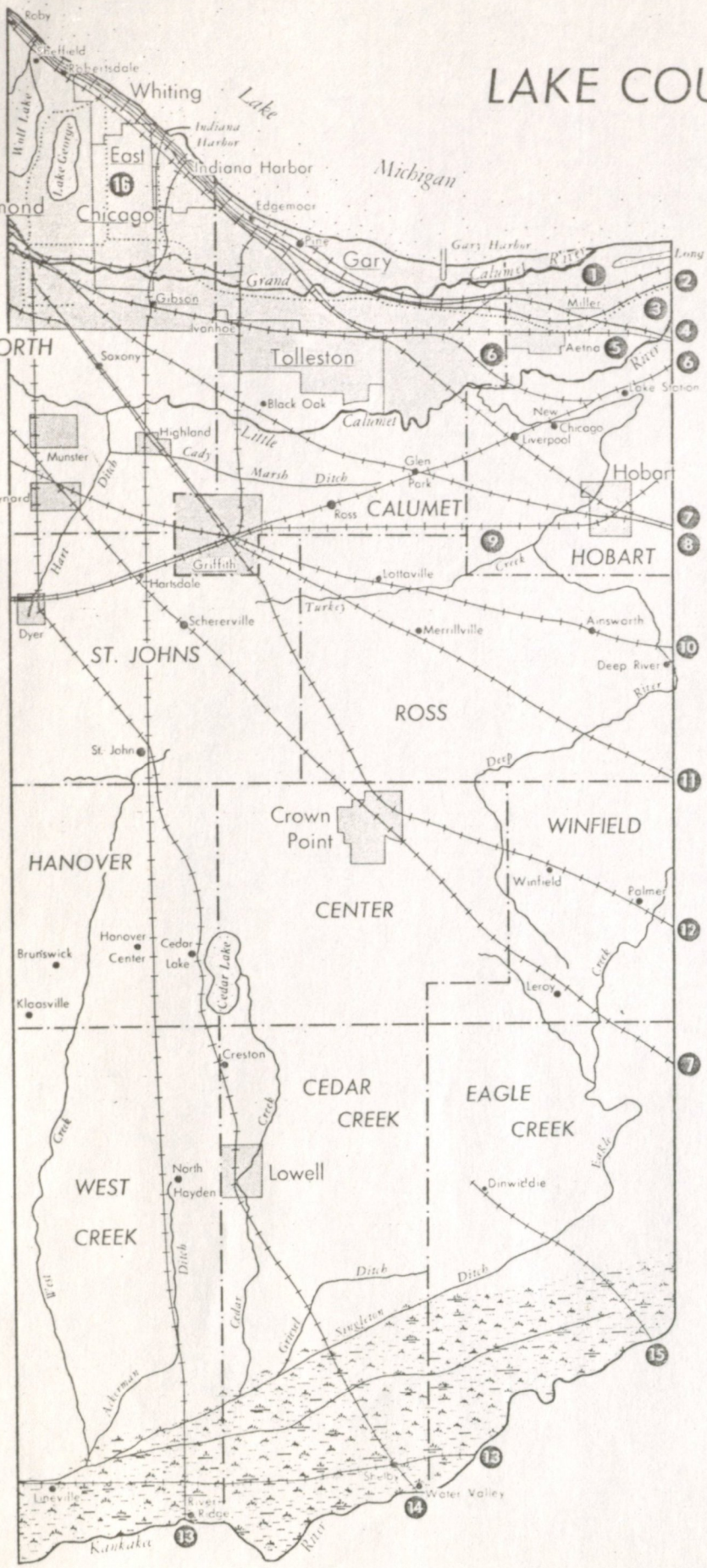


LAKE COUNTY IN 1880



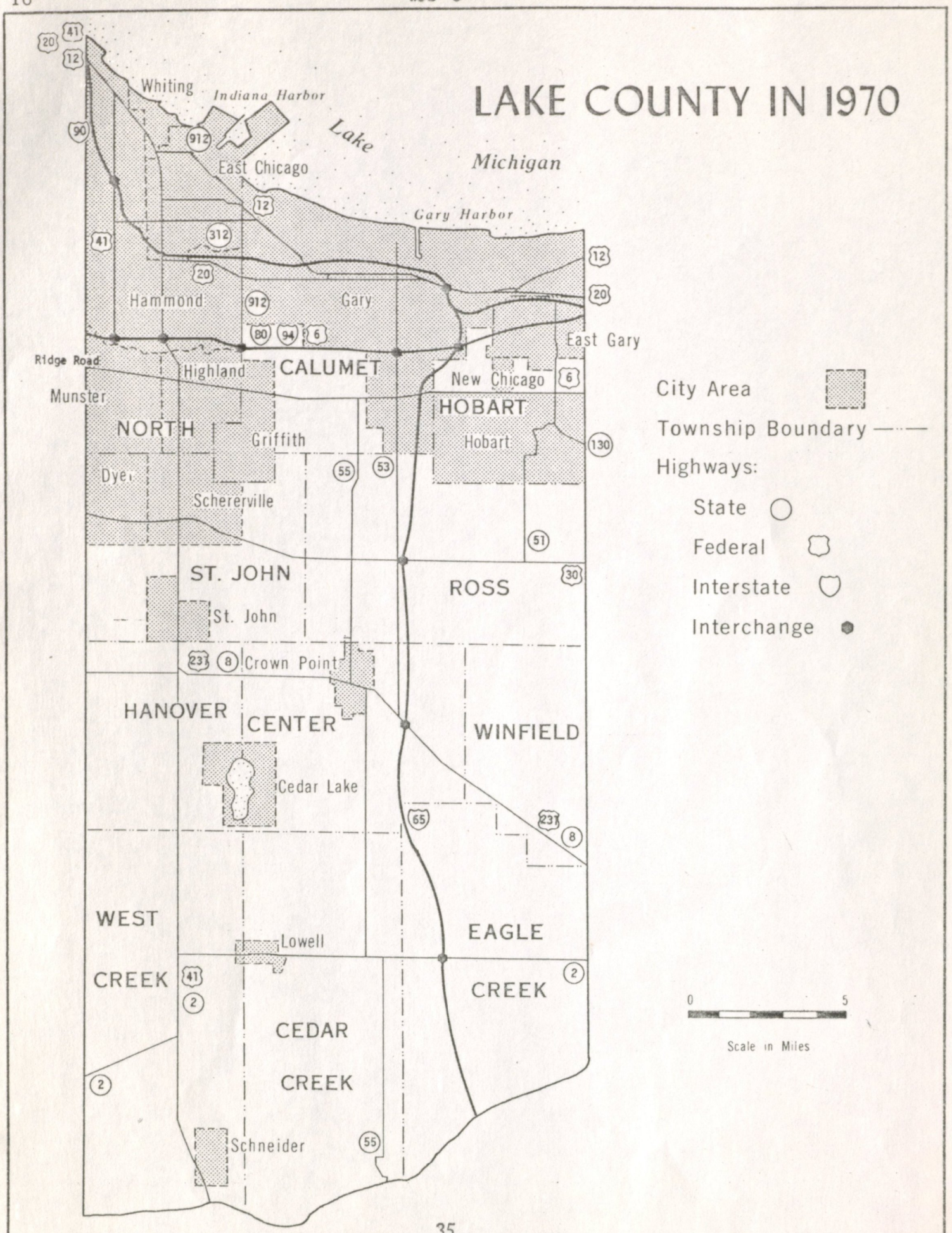
1. Lake Shore and Michigan Southern
2. Baltimore and Ohio
3. Michigan Central
4. Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne and Chicago
5. Pittsburgh, Chicago and St. Louis

LAKE COUNTY IN 1908

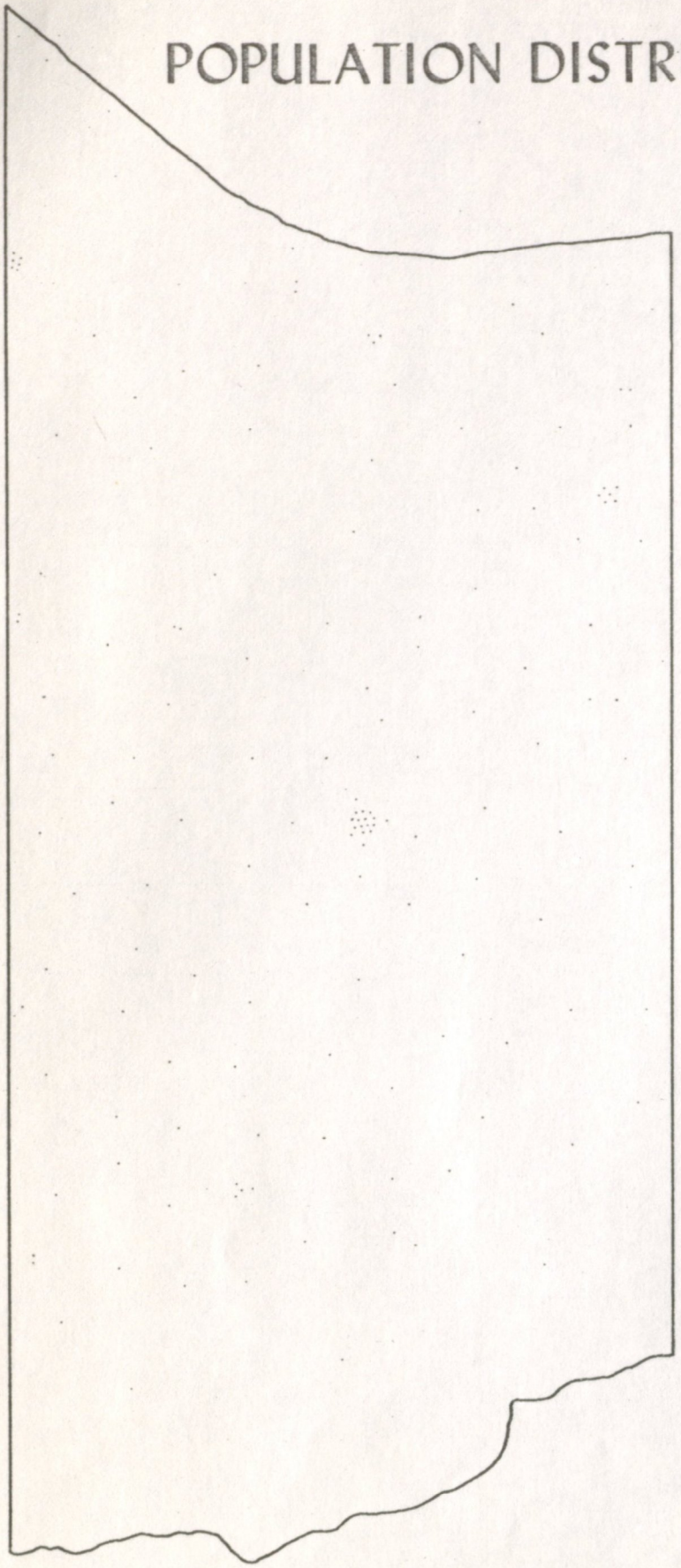


1. Chicago, Indiana and Southern
2. Lake Shore and Michigan Southern
3. Chicago Lake Shore and South Bend Electric
4. Baltimore and Ohio
5. Wabash
6. Michigan Central
7. Pennsylvania
8. New York, Chicago and St. Louis (Nickel Plate)
9. Elgin, Joliet and Eastern
10. Chicago and Grand Trunk
11. Chicago, Cincinnati and Louisville
12. Chicago and Erie
13. Chicago, Indiana and Southern
14. Chicago, Indianapolis and Louisville (Monon)
15. Chicago and Western Indiana
16. Hammond, Whiting and East Chicago Railway

MAP 8


LAKE COUNTY IN 1970
Lake
Michigan
Whiting
Indiana Harbor
East Chicago
Gary Harbor
Hammond
Gary
East Gary
Ridge Road
Highland
CALUMET
New Chicago
Munster
HOBART
NORTH
Griffith
Hobart
Dyer
Schererville
ST. JOHN
ROSS
St. John
Crown Point
HANOVER
CENTER
WINFIELD
Cedar Lake
WEST
EAGLE
Lowell
CREEK
CREEK
CEDAR
CREEK
Schneider
City Area
Township Boundary
Highways:
State
Federal
Interstate
Interchange
0
5
Scale in Miles

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN 1880



One Dot Represents

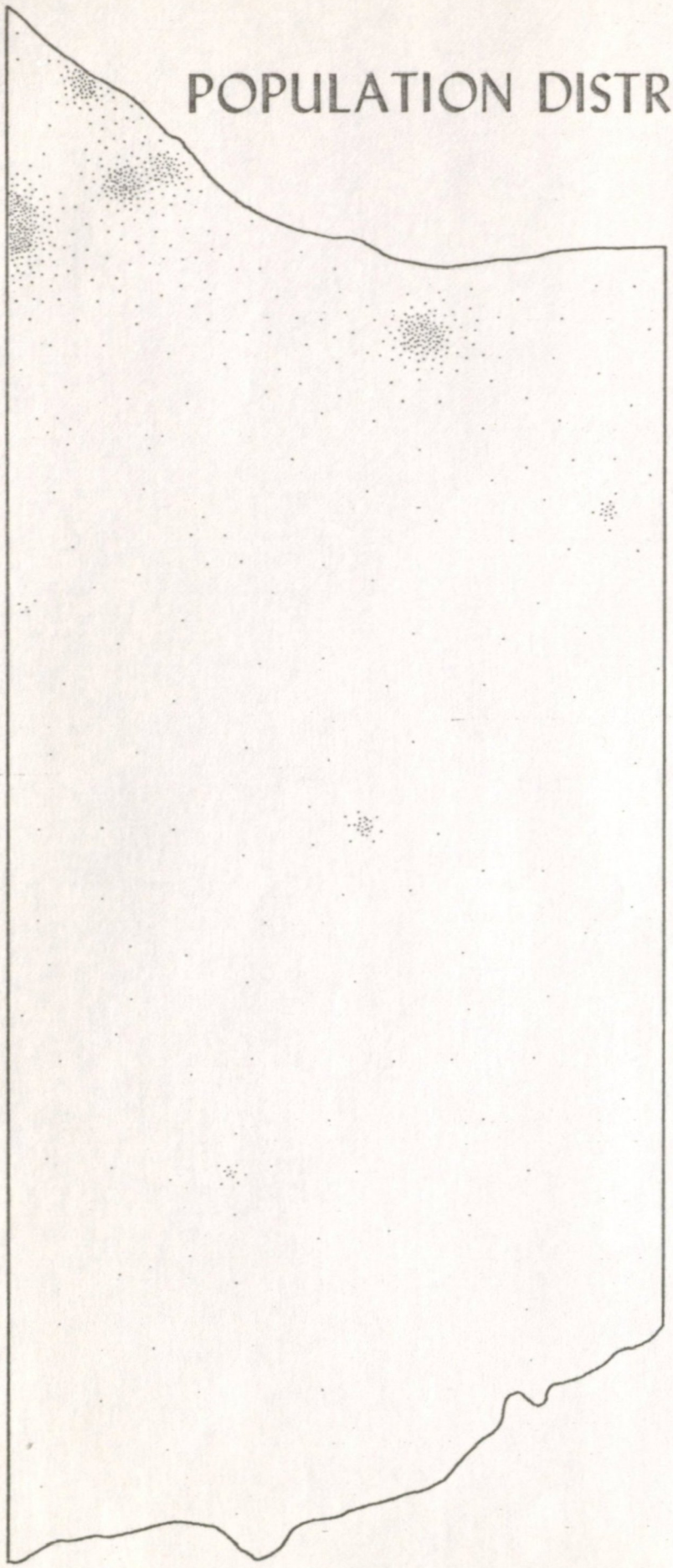
100 People

0 5

Miles

MAP 10

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN 1910



One Dot Represents

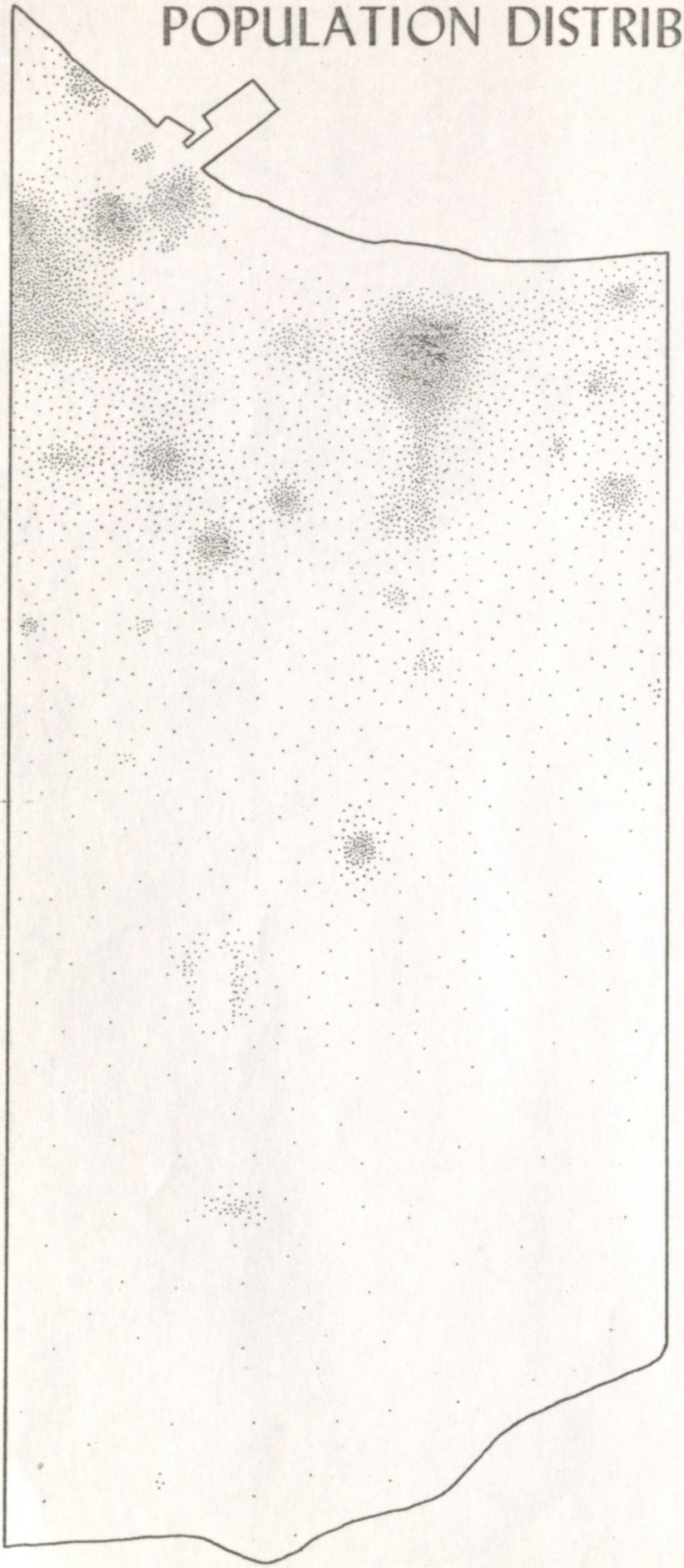
100 People

0 5

Miles

MAP 11

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN 1970



One Dot Represents

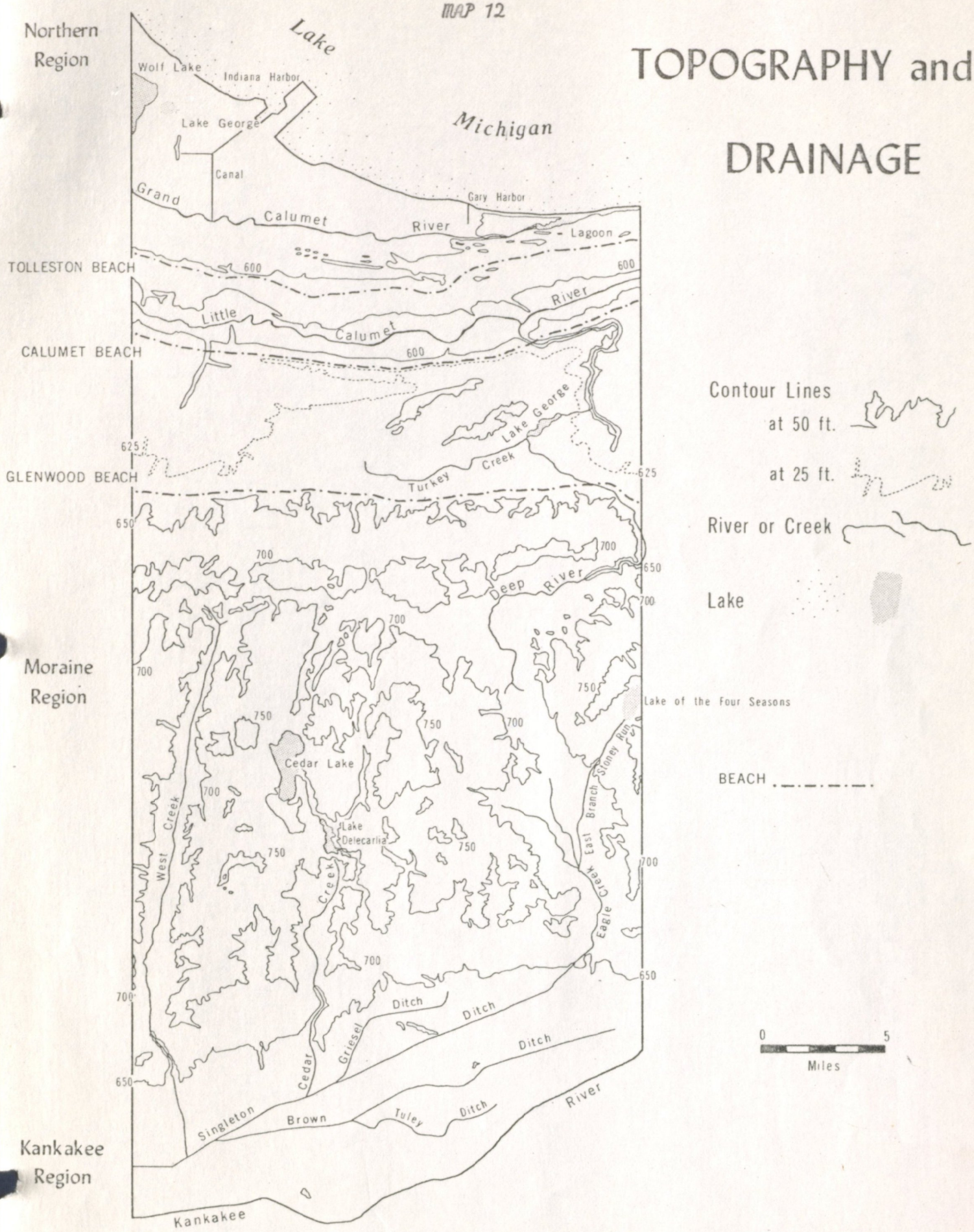
100 People

0 5

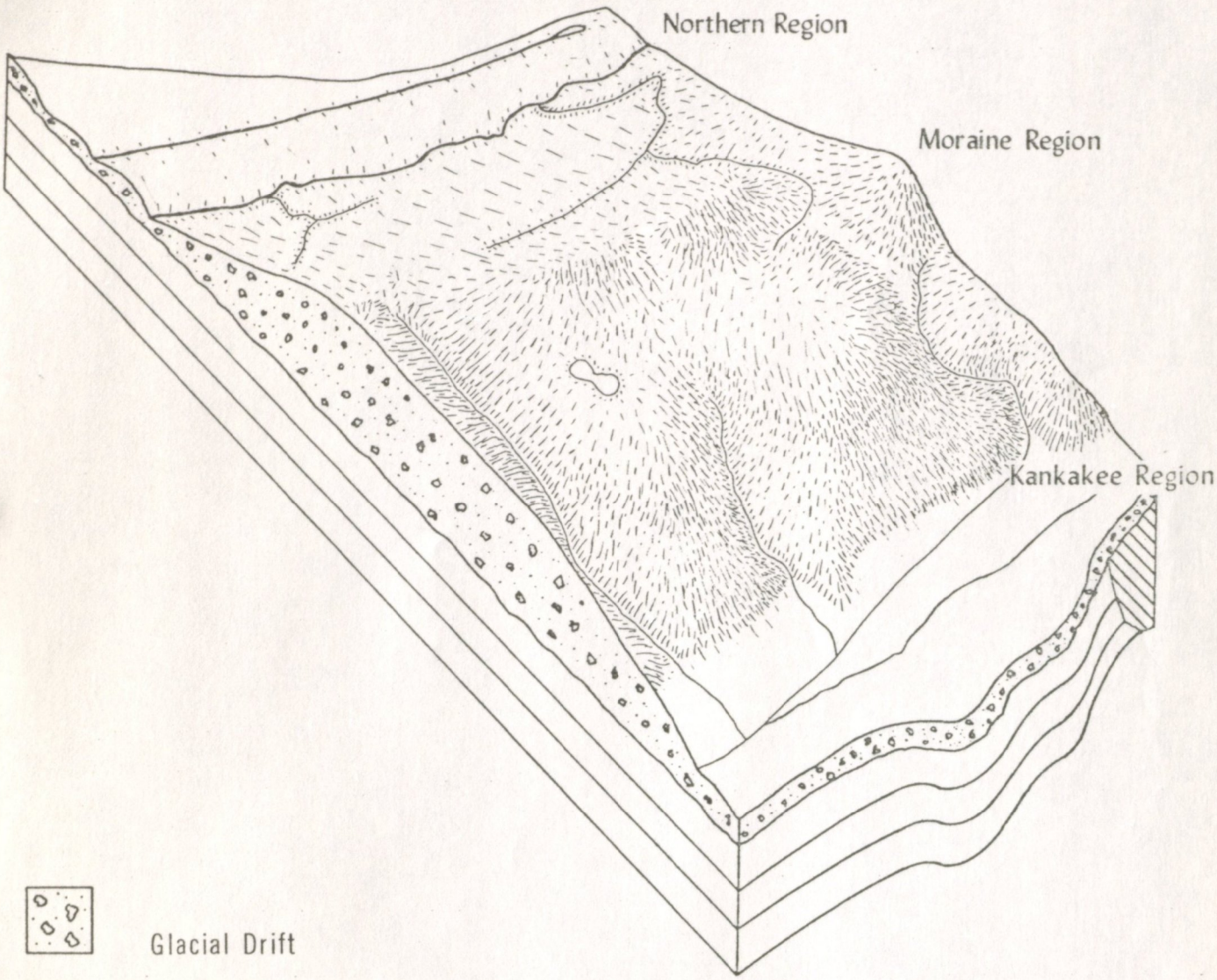
Miles

MAP 12

TOPOGRAPHY and DRAINAGE



PHYSIOGRAPHIC DIAGRAM



Glacial Drift

Niagaran Series

Salina Formations

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Halsted house - 1849

Site of Halsted mills (1852, 1868)

Main St. in the foreground; Cedar Creek at the line of trees in the background. The mills stood approximately where the smaller shed is.

Office, Dr. Robert Corns

Building was originally Pres. Church (c1910). Site of Baptist Church (1856) and Jabez Clark's cabin (1838)

Commercial Avenue (looking west)

Town Hall (formerly Carnegie Library) and Methodist Church

Jabez Clark's frame house stood approximately where the church is.

"Old Grade School" - 1896

Site of the 1862 school; now the Lowell Antique Academy

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MU
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CNL

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